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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

CRS/SAIO

Developments in Indochina

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25X1

125

9 February 1973



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25X1

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

	Page	
SOUTH VIETNAM	1	
The South Vietnamese are trying to clear the Communists out of the Tuy Hoa area before the arrival of international teams. Joint Military Commission members arriving in Kontum Province have been harassed by the local population. South Vietnamese military commanders are generally confident that the army can handle any future Communist attacks in the southern half of the country. In the preliminary talks now going on in Paris, both Saigon and the Viet Cong are showing an initial willingness to compromise.		25 x 1
		25X1
NORTH VIETNAM	5	
Hanoi is repairing southern airfields.]	25X1
CAMBODIA	6	
		25X1
Government forces are trying to retake positional along the Mekong. Former chief of statement of the statem		25X1 25X1

9 February 1973

i

political scene.

pproved For Release 2007/03/30 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001000090027-9		25X1
	Page	
LAOS	8	
Government troops withdrawing from Paksong are in disarray. Vang Pao is trying to salvage some last minute gains on the Plaine des Jarres		25X1
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS	11	
Tokyo is mulling over Hanoi recognition.		25X1

9 February 1973

ii

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SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese territorial forces are engaged in sharp fighting with Viet Cong forces north and west of the Phu Yen provincial capital of Tuy Hoa. Three government battalions have been dispatched to the area to fill the gap caused by the departure of two South Korean regiments. Province officials have said privately they hope the truce teams will not arrive for another four or five days so that there will be time to clear the Communists from about 24 hamlets that are contested or enemy-controlled.

Elsewhere, enemy action remained relatively low although a slight increase in small-scale harassing attacks was reported in the delta. The South Vietnamese have opened additional sections of major highways that have been blocked by the Communists. Some vegetable trucks are again rolling from Da Lat to Saigon.

Government Commanders Voicing Confidence

South Vietnamese military commanders are expressing confidence that the army can handle any Communist attacks in the southern half of the country. They are more apprehensive, however, about their chances in northern South Vietnam, especially Military Region (MR) 1. General Minh, commander in MR 3, said recently that he is keeping his forces on full alert and will continue to contest vigorously Communist actions anywhere in the region. Despite reports that the Communists are planning a last minute "land grab" just before the arrival of ICCS inspectors, Minh seems confident his forces can contain any such attempt. He believes in particular, that the enemy lacks the ability to mount any major assaults because of heavy casualties sustained over the past several months.

9 February 1973

-1-

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25X1

In the delta General Nghi anticipates that the Communists may try one last push there shortly before ICCS teams arrive and that the attacks will be "short" but "traumatic." He too claims that government forces will be able to handle such assaults and keep losses to a minimum. Nghi says Saigon will concede that the Communists dominate such areas as the U Minh Forest along with four or five Viet Cong smaller base areas, but will regard these locations officially as "contested" areas not under Communist control. Government troops are under orders to keep enemy units from leaving these areas and will counter any attempt to do so.

The chief of staff of the Joint General Staff (JGS), General Manh, recently expressed some concern that the Communists may try a final round of heavy attacks in the northern provinces. He said he was especially worried about Quang Ngai and Quang Tri provinces in MR-1 and that a major Communist effort in either of these areas might result in new government setbacks. He said that General Truong, the MR-1 commander, shared his concern.



PRG-GVN Talks Making Headway

Both the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) and the Thieu Government (GVN) seem genuinely interested, at least for the time being, in moving ahead in the bilateral talks. Differences have already emerged in the preliminary talks going on in

9 February 1973

-2-

Paris, but both sides have shown a willingness to compromise. The PRG, for example, backed down from its original demand that the first few sessions of the upcoming formal talks be held in Paris before moving to Saigon. The GVN, for its part, then apparently dropped its proposal to hold the inaugural session of the formal talks at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in a relatively publicity-free atmosphere.

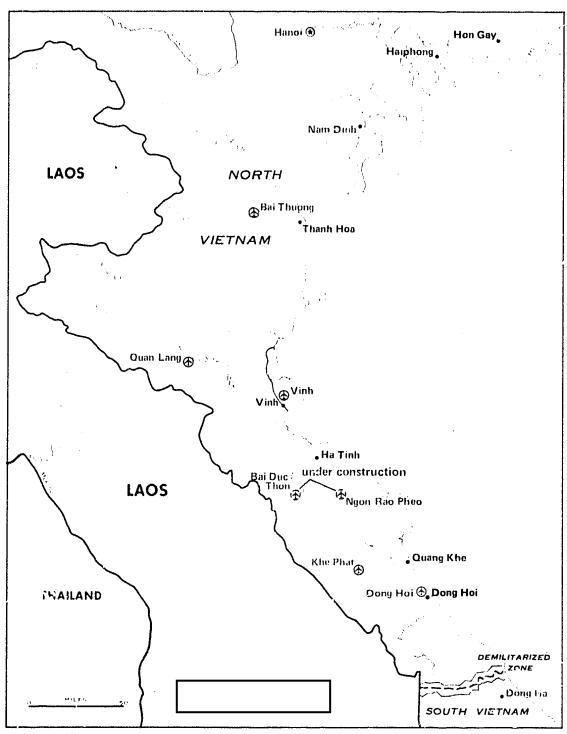
The PRG, however, has paid little heed to its agreement not to publicize the content of these discussions. Undoubtedly anxious to gain as much publicity as possible, the PRG is using the talks to enhance its international status and legitimacy. This may help account for their interest in holding as many sessions of the talks as possible in Paris. Current PRG demands for full diplomatic rights and freedom of movement when the talks begin in Saigon are in part posturing, designed to underscore PRG pretensions to be a legitimate political entity. The PRG clearly hopes to make some progress in the talks, however, and most of their demands may be modified if they prove insurmountable.

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9 February 1973





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NORTH VIETNAM

The North Vietnamese have repaired several southern airfields and are using them for trans- port activity.
The repairs consist of filling in bomb craters and clearing the graded earth runway. While these repairs permit light aircraft such as IL-14s and AN-2s to use the airfield, MIGs cannot use the field for sustained operations. The airfields at Khe Phat and Vinh also have been repaired, and both can be used for transport aircraft. The North Vietnamese are repairing facilities at Quan Lang and Bai Thuong, but these repairs are not proceeding with the same degree of urgency noted at the other airfields. Construction has apparently stopped at the two new airfields of Ngon Rao Pheo and Bai Duc Thon.
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9 February 1973

-5-

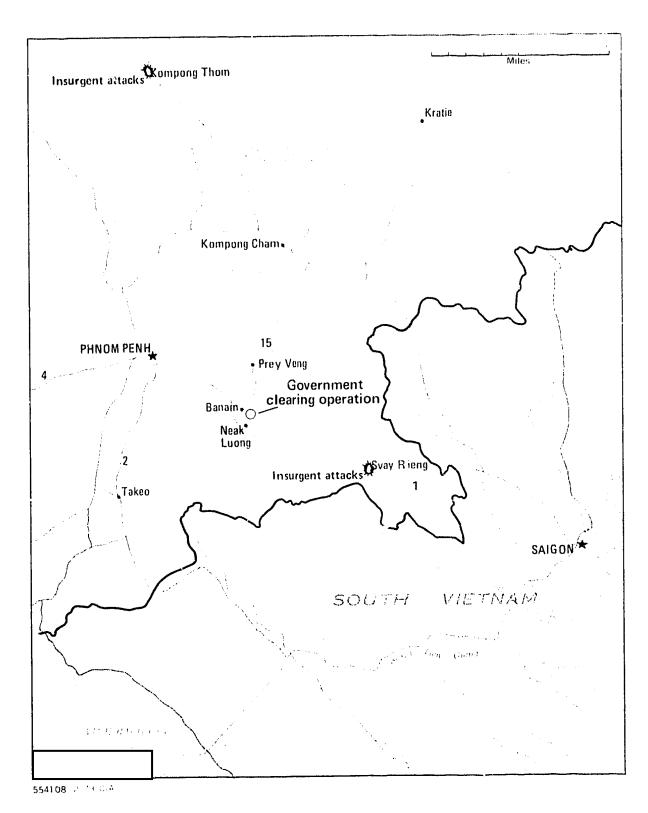
CAMBODIA

Another Peace Plan

Former chief of state Cheng Heng is refloating a peace plan first scuttled by Lon Nol early last year. He has been contacting most of the local

9 February 1973

-6-



diplomatic corps, excluding the US but including the Eastern Europeans, to tell them that the way to achieve peace is to negotiate directly with the "real leader" on the other side--Sihanouk's "prime minister," Penn Nouth. The terms to offer, according to Cheng Heng, are the group retirement of all the "old generation," including Lon Nol, Sihanouk, and himself. The politically powerless Cheng Heng claims to be speaking for "several groups," which he has as yet to identify. In view of his continuing political differences with Lon Nol, Cheng Heng's soundings may be no more than an effort to ascertain the President's standing with various countries having relations with Phnom Penh.

The Military Situation

Government forces on the east bank of the Mekong River have launched a three-battalion operation to retake several small positions in the vicinity of Banam that were overrun by Khmer insurgent elements on 7 February. Insurgent harassing attacks against Cambodian positions along Route 15 between Banam and Prey Veng have fallen off, but the insurgents are continuing to shell other government positions east of Neak Luong along Route 1.

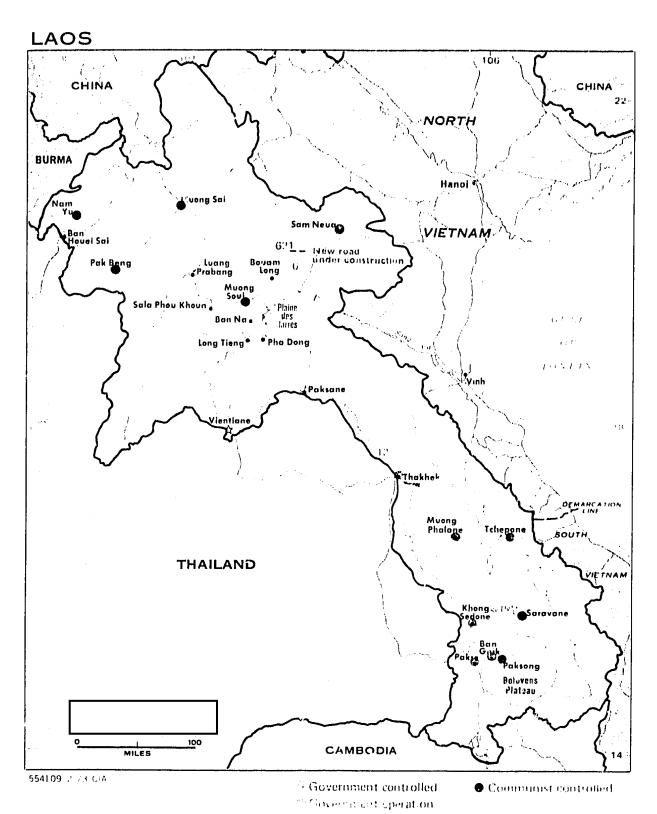
The insurgents are also keeping up the pressure against the isolated provincial capitals at Svay Rieng in the southeast and Kompong Thom in the north. Numerous shellings were carried out against Kompong Thom's defense perimeter on 8 February, and the insurgents also made a ground attack on the perimeter's southern edge.

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9 February 1973

-7-

25X1



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LAOS

The loss of Paksong on 8 February has triggered a disorderly withdrawal of nearly all government troops on the Bolovens Plateau. Government commanders are attempting to rally their units at Ban Gnik, the last natural defensive position on the western Pla-Many of the troops, however, have already deserted their units and moral ϵ of the remaining few The North Vietnamese appear to be conis shaky. solidating their control of Paksong. They will probably seek to push government forces quickly from the western Bolovens, but there is no evidence that they intend to depart from their longstanding policy and attack Pakse, the major town in southern Laos. are more likely to try to tie down as many government troops as possible to forestall a counterattack.

In the central pannandle, four irregular battalions that recently joined Lao Army troops in clearing operations south and southeast of Thakhek, are encountering little resistance. A Lao Army effort to push north from the town along Route 13 has been delayed by command problems. General Thao Ly, one of the few competent Lao Army officers, has arrived and is attempting to breathe life into this operation.

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The Northwest

The Communists have attempted no major new attacks in Houa Khong Province since they overran Nam Yu last week, but, in the next few days, they may try to grab some additional villages in the western part of the province. Difficulties in moving significant quantities of supplies across the rugged terrain south of Nam Yu are likely to prevent any major attempt to breech the defenses around Ban Houei Sai, the only important population center in this area still in government hands.

25X1

9 February 1973

Approved For Release 2007/03/30: CIA-RDP85T00875R001000090027-9

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Plugging Away Around the Plaine

With government units on the defensive elsewhere in the country, General Vang Pao has been trying for several weeks to salvage some last minute gains around the Plaine des Jarres. A force of over 2,000 irregulars is in the Muong Soui area trying to move into that Communist legistics base west of the Plaine. Lead units are within three miles of Muong Soui to the north, but Communist units have been diverted to the area from Bouam Long and Sala Phou Khoun, and there appears to be little chance that the irregulars will capture the village.

from Ban Na toward the western edge of the Plaine and
a smaller force is attempting to push toward the southern Plaine from Pha Dong.

9 February 1973

-9-



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Tokyo is actively considering recognition of Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary, Susumu Nikaido, told the press on 8 February that the government could not "forever" hold to recognition of Saigon as the only legitimate government in Vietnam. Nikaido, who is one of Prime Minister Tanaka's closest advisers, was responding to remarks made to Japanese reporters on 6 February by the chief editor of the North Vietnamese The North Vietnamese had told the reparty daily. porters that Hanoi was prepared to overlook Japan's cooperation with the US in the Vietnam war and that Tokyo' relations with Saigon would not hinder the establishment of normal relations with his country. The Japanese official characterized Hanoi's attitude as realistic and said the Japanese should be flexible. Nikaido's statement comes on the heels of Australian and Canadian recognition of Hanoi.

Despite the forthcoming attitude on both sides, the Japanese fear a number of issues may arise. They are concerned that Hanoi may insist on bilateral postwar aid or press Japan to include aid for areas under Provisional Revolutionary Government control. The Japanese favor a multilateral approach to reconstruction, partly because Japan is already under some criticism in Southeast Asia for being too heavily involved economically in the area. Tokyo also has to consider its relations with Saigon, which it intends to retain.

Hanoi's terms may be spelled out when a Japanese delegation headed by the Foreign Ministry's First Southeast Asian Division chief, visits Hanoi on 20 February, after attending a Japanese ambassadors' conference on Vietnam in Bangkok.

25X1

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9 February 1973

-11-

